

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Maryland Works respectfully submits this letter in strong support of **HB226, Department of Disabilities – Housing Programs and Affiliated Foundations – Establishment.**

Maryland Works serves as a coordinating entity for employment opportunities for people with disabilities and works closely with State agencies, providers, and employers to advance economic mobility, independence, and inclusion. We strongly support this legislation because it creates a flexible, cost-neutral tool that will allow the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) to strengthen and sustain critical programs that directly support employment, assistive technology, and affordable housing for people with disabilities.

This bill authorizes MDOD to establish one or more independent, non-government affiliated foundations to raise private funds, pursue grants, and form public-private partnerships. These foundations would provide essential supplemental support to MDOD programs that face rising costs, limited growth capacity, or uncertain future federal funding, while imposing **no fiscal cost to the State.**

Maryland Works is particularly supportive of the potential impact on the **Maryland Technology Assistance Program (MDTAP)** and the **Assistive Technology Guaranteed Loan Program (ATLP)**. Assistive technology is foundational to employment success for many individuals with disabilities. MDTAP's lending libraries and ATLP's low-interest loan programs directly support workforce participation, yet both programs face growth limitations due to funding constraints. The ability to leverage private philanthropy through an affiliated foundation would help stabilize and expand access to these critical employment supports.

We also strongly support the bill's benefit to the **Office of Disability Employment Advancement and Policy (ODEAP)**, which leads the State as a Model Employer initiative. As Maryland Works collaborates with State agencies and employers to improve hiring and retention of people with disabilities, we recognize that philanthropic partners often prefer to donate to non-governmental entities for tax and administrative reasons. This legislation removes that barrier and enables private investment in disability employment innovation and systems change.

Finally, the bill's support for the **Affordable Apartments Program** aligns with Maryland Works' understanding that stable, accessible housing is inseparable from employment success. Allowing MDOD to reestablish and expand private partnerships through affiliated

foundations will help ensure that housing initiatives for people with disabilities can grow beyond their current capacity.

HB226 follows successful models already in State law and mirrors legislation enacted for other agencies, such as the Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Stadium Authority. It provides MDOD with modern, responsible tools to strengthen programs without increasing State spending, while increasing accountability, innovation, and sustainability.

For these reasons, Maryland Works urges a **favorable report** on HB226. We appreciate the Committee's consideration and its continued commitment to advancing opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities.

Respectfully submitted,

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